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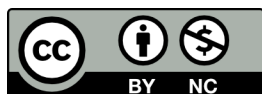
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Book Reviews

Chryssoula Lascaratou. *The Language of Pain. Expression or description?*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007. 237 pages. ISBN 9789027238962

This is a remarkable book on the linguistic dimensions of pain, one which contributes to the development of cross-linguistic scholarship in the domain of language and pain. Its publication attests to the fascinating multifacetedness of research in language and emotion that has been accumulating over the past twenty years, most notably in the fields of developmental pragmatics (e.g., Ochs and Schieffelin 1989), linguistic anthropology (e.g., Goodwin and Goodwin 2001, Wilce 2009) and cognitive linguistics (e.g., Wierzbicka 1999). Chryssoula Lascaratou's work is well situated in the theoretical framework of Functional Grammar, which she successfully combines with a cognitive semantics perspective (pp. 1-2). The rich findings that emerge from the combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of doctor-patient interactions recorded over a period of 22 months shed light on the lexico-grammatical construal of physical pain and its metaphorical conceptualization in Greek.

The title of the book, *The Language of Pain*, is useful as a way of clearly delimiting the area of research, while at the same time echoing a range of “languages” constructed by linguists (such as “the language of advertising” or “the language of email”), which entail a certain degree of reification of dynamic domains of linguistic activity. This is, however, acknowledged and justified by the author in the introduction, where it is noted that “by making pain our *object* of research, we are unconsciously (or subconsciously) engaging ourselves in a process of *objectifying* it” in order to accept and perhaps tame pain (p. 3).

In Chapter 2, the way the language of pain is conceptualized in this study is made explicit, thus setting the theoretical ground for the investigation of the relation between language and pain in terms of two interrelated questions: i. *what language is for pain* and ii. *what pain is for language* (the key question in this study). It would seem that these two interrelated questions set pain apart from language, by construing pain mainly as a subjective, rather than as an intersubjective experience and by emphasizing language's referential, rather than indexical functions. However, the conceptualization of pain and language in this study is in line with its clearly stated aim to portray “how pain is

profiled by Greek language, which should, ultimately, contribute to an understanding of how pain is perceived by the sufferer” (p. 29).

Chapter 3 discusses methodological issues concerning corpus design and data collection. The study relies on a corpus of 131 recorded dialogues (69,996 words) between patients and health-care professionals, which the author refers to as “everyday encounters” (p. 3, p. 7). A discussion of the extent to which such encounters can be considered ordinary rather than institutional (Drew and Heritage 1998 [1992]: 21–22) would be welcome here, as it could also contribute to an elaboration of the author’s noteworthy remark that this particular type of doctor-patient interaction encourages most of the collected metaphors or nominal constructions (p. 7, p. 121, pp. 178–180). This is a minor issue, though, when one considers this study in the context of related studies in cognitive semantics which tend to rely on elicited, invented or highly selective data. The ‘bottom-up’ approach followed here has to be recognized as a major advantage and an important step towards understanding how pain is conceptualized in specific contexts.

Chapter 4 is a brief but clear summary of Halliday’s suggested types of process clauses and it could stand on its own as a particularly useful teaching resource. In chapter 5, we obtain an initial perspective on the data, thanks to frequency counts of pain constructions which bring to the fore the predominant occurrence of verb forms (in particular of the lexeme *ponáo*) that point to the construal of pain as a process. The author considers this kind of construal as an indication of Greek speakers’ preference for the “more direct, dramatic, and dynamic framing of pain provided by verbs” which could be related to Greek cultural attitudes (p. 48). This culturally-based account remains justifiably tentative, thus avoiding the trap of cultural essentialism. Instead, the author draws attention to the rich morphology of the Greek language, which gives speakers of Greek the possibility “to express nuances of processes” (p. 48).

Chapters 6 and 7 form the backbone of the functional account of Greek pain constructions as process and as participant/thing, respectively. Chapter 6, drawing extensively on the collected data, illustrates and discusses identified patterns in pain configurations, which are summarized in general and more refined counts across five different tables. The findings here should not appear counter-intuitive to Greek speakers, as they point to the statistical prevalence of the intransitive-personal *ponáo* ‘I hurt-I’m hurting’ (47%) and the relatively frequent occurrence of the intransitive-impersonal *ponáei* ‘it hurts- it’s hurting’ (20%) (see Table 1, p.62). These configurations are considered to be akin to interjections that serve an exclamatory function, while in terms of textual grammar, it is suggested that intransitive-personal *ponáo* pain configurations provide a holistic thematic perspective for the communication of pain (p. 82).

The rich findings in this chapter, which lead the author to establish that verbal configurations of pain serve an expressive function, open up questions beyond the scope of this book concerning the degree of conventionalization of such linguistic patterns in doctor-patient encounters in terms of their discourse and interactional functions.

In Chapter 7, the functional analysis of lexico-grammatical features of pain is completed. The focus is placed on nominal expressions and their construal in terms of Halliday's suggested semantic categories of pain (*bounded or unbounded entity, possession, temporal location and extent, accompanying conditions, location within the body, variable intensity, and variable qualities*, p. 104). The findings shed light on the descriptive functions served by nominal constructions which represent pain as a 'participant'. Apart from the significant contribution of reported findings to functional descriptions of Greek in comparison to English, this chapter also highlights differences between the medical register used as a tool for measuring and assessing pain (pp. 113–115) and folk terms of perceiving and articulating pain which could be useful to health experts concerned with the design of such tools.

Folk conceptualisations of pain receive a cognitive semantics treatment in the rather extended, but definitely rewarding, Chapter 8, which looks at the role of metaphor in nominal pain constructions. The analysis points to an array of metaphors (e.g., *pain as a malevolent aggressor, a torturer, an imprisoning enemy*) that sufferers employ in their attempt to identify and describe pain (p. 180). The author suggests that these metaphors are various realizations of the general metaphor *pain is a force* (p. 138). It might be worth noting, here, that the use of metonymically-derived metaphors of *fire/heat* by patients (p. 165) echoes Maniat mourners' metaphorical articulations of pain in terms of *burning* and *fire*. Despite this similarity, though, the way patients and mourners conceptualize pain seems to differ in terms of the construal of pain as a *singular* versus a *plural* experience, respectively. Whereas patients understand pain as referring only to their own experience of suffering, mourners understand it as referring both to the survivor's experiencing of pain and that borne by the deceased in the course of their lives (Seremetakis 1991: 115). Such a comparison suggests the importance of ideologies of self and language in shaping meaningful articulations of pain across different cultural milieus (see Wilce 2009: 64–66). It seems, therefore, useful to remind culturally-oriented scholars of language and pain that this study's findings specifically refer to medical contexts of 21st century Athens (2000–2001).

To sum up, despite the demand that "painstaking" analyses in this book might place upon the reader, the clarity of expression throughout the book and in particular the conciseness of the summary of findings (Chapter 9) bring

this fascinating work closer to the wide-ranging audience it deserves. This is a book that achieves its clearly-stated aims and would be of interest not only to functional and cognitive linguists, but also to healthcare professionals interested in improving aspects of doctor-patient communication in Greek. In the context of the increasingly felt need for interdisciplinary work on language and emotion, this book should be read by anyone interested in language, pain and emotion.

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